

Local Housing Research and Urban Redevelopment

*A Review Article**

by ALBERT ROSE

School of Social Work, University of Toronto

INTEREST in local housing research in Canada has been greatly stimulated by the events of the wartime and postwar years. Programs of direct construction of rental housing such as Wartime Housing Limited (1941-1947) and the Veterans' Rental Projects (1948-1949), involved some municipalities, for the first time, in a moderate share of responsibility for the provision of housing accommodation and the planning of the communities thus created.

The 1949 Amendments to the National Housing Act were widely acclaimed as a federal-provincial approach to the problems of providing housing accommodation and, in due time, to the achievement of slum clearance and urban redevelopment programs. The new approach has not altered the basic fact, however, that initiative in these matters must come from local, or, if you will, (considering the nature of political organization in this country), from municipal sources. It is worth noting, too, that in most provinces the probable municipal share of the financial outlay involved in making use of

the 1949 Amendments will be at least as great as the share of the provincial government. This is clear from the limited experience of 1950.

For a great many years, in a number of Canadian municipalities, groups of conscientious and thoughtful persons have come to realize that for the most part we know very little of the overall facts of housing provision and the prevalence of slum, except that the situation generally appears "bad" and does not seem to be getting much better. These groups have included, from time to time, in addition to citizens with purely lay or professional interest in these matters, the elected representatives of the people and certain administrative officials of the municipalities.

During the past decade particularly, citizens' organizations of relatively small groups of persons have stimulated a number of surveys, studies, projects of one sort or another, all of which have loosely been termed "local housing research". One of the best known of such organizations was the Citizens' Housing and Planning Association of Toronto, formed during the last war, which later became the Greater Toronto Branch of the

*REBUILDING A NEIGHBOURHOOD by Leonard C. Marsh. Vancouver: University of British Columbia (Research Publications No. 1), 1950. Price \$2.00.

Community Planning Association of Canada. Robert H. Saunders, former Mayor of Toronto, stated publicly on many occasions that it was a brief of this association presented in November, 1946, which persuaded him to seek an early vote on the question of proceeding with the Regent Park Housing Project in Toronto.

Efforts to secure more adequate data in the fields of housing and slum clearance have been made as well, under the auspices of local welfare or planning councils, private and public welfare agencies, county health units, and the municipal governments themselves. The formation of the Community Planning Association in 1946 with five regional divisions and a number of local branches stimulated this development still more.

Research Methods Employed

The research techniques or methods, if they can be called such, have varied as greatly as the sponsorship of the studies. Some have employed what may be described as a "budgetary approach" in which attention was focussed upon the standard and cost of living of certain urban dwellers. An example of this is shown in the *Report of the City Council's Survey Committee on Housing Conditions in Toronto, 1943*, published as a report of the Board of Control, City of Toronto, in 1943.

It appeared from this kind of study that a good many families could afford little or none of their incomes for housing if they were to enjoy, under certain assump-

tions, a specific standard of living in other respects. Other studies have involved merely the provision of questionnaires which were to be completed and returned presumably by those in dire need of shelter per se or of more adequate housing. The cities of Calgary and Vancouver attempted such studies during 1949. Only 436 replies were received in Calgary and about 2,500 in Vancouver.

At least one project employed almost in toto the techniques developed by the Committee on the Hygiene of Housing of the American Public Health Association for the study of local housing conditions and needs, and described in *An Appraisal Method for Measuring the Quality of Housing*, published by the APHA in 1945. A city of about 20,000 persons, St. Thomas, Ontario, was surveyed by this method in 1949, and a mimeographed report entitled "Housing and Health Survey 1949" was issued early in 1950. The St. Thomas survey was conducted under the auspices of the County Health Unit.

The techniques of market analysis have been used to some extent in a few localities, particularly by those interested in the promotion of real estate sales, to ascertain market conditions, the nature and quantity of both the supply and the demand for housing. These have been essentially commercial studies with no particular social import. For example see *Canadian Homes, a Survey of Urban and Farm Housing*, a confidential report

issued by Lever Brothers, Toronto, in 1945.

It is worth noting, and emphasizing, that the Regent Park Housing Project was assisted into being by what was known as the Toronto Metropolitan Housing Research Project, carried on from 1946 to 1948 and directed by Humphrey Carver, with the assistance of funds from the three levels of government. (The Toronto Metropolitan Housing Research Project published a pamphlet, *How Much Housing Does Greater Toronto Need?* by Humphrey Carver, in May 1946, and the Toronto Reconstruction Council another, *Who Can Pay for Housing?* by Humphrey Carver and Robert Adamson in December 1946.) In the Toronto situation a great deal of support was mustered by local citizens' organizations, and the project came to fruition *without* an overall analysis of all aspects of slum living and housing needs in Toronto.

The New "Marsh Report"

Recently published, under the authorship of Leonard Marsh, is the most detailed and comprehensive report of a local housing research project made in this country since publication of the "Bruce Report" in 1934.* *Rebuilding a Neighbourhood* is based upon the work and initiative of the Vancouver Housing Association, a dynamic citizens' organization which is the envy of similar organizations from coast to coast.

*Report of the Lieutenant-Governor's Committee on Housing Conditions in Toronto. Hunter-Rose Company Limited, Toronto, 1934.

Whether it is the climate, or the concentration of a group of brilliant people in the Lower Mainland Region of British Columbia, or the presence of indefatigable leaders like Leonard Marsh and P. R. U. Stratton, Harry Jackson and H. D. Wilson—whatever the reason—it is well known among lay and professional persons interested in housing and community planning that the Vancouver group is far ahead of other groups in furthering housing research in Canada.

The report is sub-titled "Report on a Slum Clearance and Urban Rehabilitation Project in a Key Central Area in Vancouver". As such it is more than a description of a survey of local housing conditions and needs; and, paradoxically, much less than that. Marsh has written an analysis of the situation in a well-defined area in Vancouver, an area described as not one of unqualified slum but one of deterioration and blight, and potentially slum. It is not considered to be the worst such area in the city. The analysis carries with it, in addition, an attempt at a well-reasoned solution: a detailed program for the redevelopment of the area, even unto the blueprints of the administration building and other service facilities, and three-dimensional drawings of shops.

In its final form, the author points out, the survey was sponsored by the University of British Columbia, with funds from Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the City of Vancouver. He expresses the hope that the report,

longer than might have been necessary for local purposes, may serve as something of a "type study" ("Sponsorship and Acknowledgements"). For this reason this article is intended to explore in some detail the strengths and weaknesses of this formidable document, since it would seem that Dr. Marsh's hope will necessarily be disappointed.

Methods of Research

In the summer of 1947 a group of University of British Columbia students were set to work on the collection of data concerning housing conditions and needs for the so-called Demonstration Housing Survey which is the basis of the report. The method employed was the familiar one of a research interview recorded on a prepared schedule. This schedule required the collection of a great deal of evidence concerning the physical features of the structures surveyed, the nature and condition of the internal features of the dwelling units within the structures, and the facilities within the dwelling units for cooking, heating and food storage, as well as the presence or absence of telephone, radio, car and garage (p. 69).

On the reverse side of the schedule a good deal of information was secured concerning the families inhabiting such dwelling units, for instance the family constellation, the relationship of members to each other, their occupations and places of work, their incomes and/or nature and amounts of pensions or

public assistance. Other data included the monthly rent and length of tenancy and the amount of rent the family could afford to pay "if a new low-rent housing scheme can be built in this area" (p. 70). The number of rooms used as bedrooms was recorded, together with the number of persons occupying them. In all 1,049 families were surveyed.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Presentation of the Report is logical. It begins with "The Area As It Is" and follows with "The Area As It Might Be". No reader could quarrel with such an arrangement nor fail to be impressed with the excellent illustrative photographs which document the first section or the drawings which document the second. In places, however, they tend to interrupt the text unnecessarily and might better have been grouped together at the beginning or end of each section. These interruptions are particularly annoying when one is devoting intense effort to following the statistical argument which almost all readers will find difficult.

This latest "Marsh Report" is most memorable in that it drives home, repeatedly, the facts of urban life in regard to housing and community planning which too few Canadians have considered to any extent. For some fifty to seventy-five years our dozen or so metropolitan areas have developed in an almost haphazard, certainly unplanned, fashion, with the central cities annexing, from time to time, such fringe areas as seemed re-

quired for future development. The urban cores have quietly and steadily deteriorated until to-day each of these metropolitan areas, without exception, has an almost solid band of blight and slum clear across what was once the city proper. Yet in Vancouver, as in every other Canadian city with the recent exception of the Regent Park Project in Toronto, not a single acre of slum has ever been cleared for the purpose of putting a rehousing project in its place. "For the most part, blight has increased; while the expanding suburbs draw off the more well-to-do residents, the deterioration of the central districts is increased by overcrowding and the change-over of older houses to suites or rooming houses. Both are accentuated by the scarcity of cheap rental accommodation." (Foreword, pp. iii and iv.)

The only answer, at this late date, is slum clearance and urban redevelopment or rehabilitation. As Marsh points out in the Foreword, which contains some of the best writing (and worst proofreading) in the Report, "The clearance of slum areas, however, is important in its own right. It attacks intolerable conditions and unnecessary misery and corruption, and it attacks them at their core. Slum clearance is also the key to the conquest of blight. In fact, the problems of modern cities are such that *urban rehabilitation* rather than 'slum clearance' is a much more adequate description of the task." (Foreword p. iii.) He goes

on to emphasize the inability of residents of sub-standard accommodation to provide more suitable accommodation in view of their modest incomes, and to stress the fact that house building in the post-war period has been primarily for sale, and at relatively high prices.

Throughout the first section Marsh continues to pound home somewhat familiar arguments which are worth repeating to Canadians as often as possible in these days of war, postwar and prewar crises. In one paragraph he sums up the nature of slum populations so succinctly that this description would probably serve for most areas on this continent. "People do not 'make the slums'. Deteriorated housing is cheap housing; so is converted housing and over-crowded housing. Low rents bring people to districts like the Strathcona Area: limited budgets keep them there. There are plenty of exceptions, of course, such as those who live there because they built in the area long ago, when it was new, respectable and 'near to town'. Immigration has its influences: many came here simply because friends or relatives of the same race or nationality were located here before them. Others—a growing proportion, as the houses were turned into rooms and suites—are completely transient." (p. 7.)

Dr. Marsh goes on at great length through three chapters and twenty-nine pages, to present the evidence concerning the area as it is and the people who live in it. At this stage the author appears

to have fallen into what is perhaps *the* major trap of local housing research presentation, namely the mass of data available and the difficulty of presenting it cogently. It may be difficult for the average reader to appreciate just how much data can be provided by 1,049 completed schedules of the type described and the infinite number of quantitative and qualitative relationships which can be explored. The task of selection, of well-ordered and comprehensible presentation, is simply prodigious. One of the difficulties of this report is simply that the statistical tables are poorly presented, with insufficient explanation of their significance and meaning, and are indeed difficult to follow even for those like myself who profess to be teachers of statistical methods. Moreover the type is small and the page numbering deceptive, for each page contains on a quarto-size sheet, split vertically in half, as much material as three or more pages in an ordinary text. The proof-reading is abominable and the book does the publisher little credit.

The Social and Economic Cost of Slums

Chapter 4, entitled "The Cost of Slums and Blight" is a noteworthy contribution to Canadian housing literature. Dr. Marsh is careful to emphasize that "The biggest cost of the slum to society is apathetic, dreary living, which is a menace to every aspect of healthy citizenship" (p. 23), but goes on to point

out that "... the economic problems have become plainer in recent times, and they are forcing themselves on the attentions of every large city. Slums are a problem of municipal finance: not only because social ills cost money—a hard fact which some comfortable citizens still refuse to face—but because deterioration in the older areas of the city saps at the roots of municipal revenues. When slum development is combined . . . with excessive decentralization and a flight to the outer areas on the part of both housing and industry, the consequences can be disastrous." (p. 18.)

This is an excellent statement of the so-called "metropolitan problem" and needs to be repeated again and again to Canadian urban dwellers and their elected representatives at both the municipal and provincial levels. The sooner these facts receive the consideration they deserve from our municipal and provincial governments, the sooner will they find ways of administering and governing to solve the problems of the present and prevent their recurrence with each succeeding generation of urban growth.

This section of the Report is devoted to a detailed cost analysis and the preparation of a balance sheet for the Strathcona Area in Vancouver. It is a fascinating analysis. On the one side we have the social and economic problems of every description making necessary every conceivable form of social service—public assistance, pensions, health and medical care,

child welfare, delinquency and other services. For relatively small populations in blighted or slum areas there is involved a tremendous expenditure of public funds by all governments and of private welfare funds. On the other side there is the almost negligible tax revenue derived from these areas, particularly by the municipal governments, whose property assessments must necessarily be trivial. For the municipalities the balance represents a large net deficit which must be borne by other residents, often little better off than the slum dwellers.

It is too little understood in this country, where urban redevelopment has scarcely been attempted, that a program of rehabilitation such as is proposed for the Survey Area, will not merely eliminate the deficit but will result in a net surplus. Within a short time, social breakdown will be very greatly reduced, thereby eliminating a substantial proportion of public and private municipal social welfare expenditures. On the revenue side of the balance sheet, the new housing created is intended to bear its full share of municipal taxation and the greatly increased value of the property will mean many times the previously collected tax revenue for the municipality. Few people in Canada know that with less than one-third of the Regent Park Project completed the City of Toronto is deriving more tax revenue in 1951 than was previously collected from the entire redevelopment area.

The Area As It Might Be

Unlike a good many other reports of this kind, this one contains a rather detailed description of a program of slum clearance and urban rehabilitation. Drawings are included of the entire area as it would appear when replanned. More detailed drawings depict the layout of a variety of housing accommodation including row houses, one-room suites, and one to three-bedroom apartments. As a planned community the replanned area would include all of the ancillary facilities which round out a neighbourhood, that is a community centre, shops, a nursery, health clinic and administration building. A new school would not be required for a time, although a drawing is included. Four stages of development of the area are contemplated and are depicted on a separate map.

It is difficult for the lay reader to make an intelligent appraisal of this urban redevelopment program. In the limited experience of this reviewer, it is almost impossible to get two or more professional planners to agree on the validity and design of any planning project. It would seem however that Marsh's proposals are realistic and if followed would go very far to create a genuine neighbourhood out of an area of mixed and wasteful land uses.

Reconstruction of the area would be relatively easy in terms of the provision of physical services such as water supply, sewage disposal, public utilities, etc. This again is a point worth emphasizing for Can-

adians. The great difficulty of our present "flight to the suburbs" is the very lack of such services and the enormous physical and financial burden involved in providing services for people who are essentially urban dwellers. Urban redevelopment promises us that full advantages of what we have already already created and what we have already paid for.

This section of the report includes two additional chapters of extreme importance. Chapter 6 is devoted to the Financing of the Project, and the last chapter to Administration, including the question of the local housing authority and the rent scale. These are well worth reading in themselves, although there is some tendency on the part of the author to "brush off" the financial experience in Regent Park as irrelevant and a "backhanded device". It is by no means clear to this reviewer that the financial proposals (Proposals of the Survey, p. xi, No.'s 9-13) make the best use of the opportunities available under the National Housing Act. Why is it necessary, for example, to assume that the excess cost of the acquisition and clearance of the land should be anything less than the full total cost of such acquisition and clearance? In the case of Regent Park the Housing Authority received the land at a nominal cost of one dollar, and the Dominion Government provided one-half of the full total excess cost over this amount.

Could not this precedent be adopted?

Concluding Comments

This critical analysis of *Rebuilding a Neighbourhood* is not intended, for one moment, to suggest that Marsh and his co-workers have not made a substantial contribution to Canadian housing and community planning developments. The fact that this very good report has been prepared is a tremendous achievement. The report itself is well worth the detailed consideration of a great many Canadians. We have tended too much in this country to avoid facing the facts of urban dwelling, particularly in terms of our housing and community planning activities. Deterioration has progressed so far that only imaginative and extensive programs of urban redevelopment will rectify the errors of the past.

It is not too late, either, to forestall a recurrence of these conditions in the new housing developments which have mushroomed in Canada during the past decade. Sound community planning is not all that is required, although there is very little of that. There must be, in addition, a very general awareness on the part of Canadians of both the short and long term problems involved in creating communities, rather than mere groups of houses. Dr. Marsh's report in this sense is a very real warning and a significant indication of what can be accomplished if we choose to recognize the facts and make the best of our opportunities.

CANADIAN

Welfare

September 15, 1951

VOL. XXVII, NO. 3-4

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

I am glad to commend once again the annual campaigns of the Community Chest and Welfare Federations.

Each local campaign is really several campaigns combined in one. Under the symbol of the Red Feather, many social welfare agencies unite in their appeal for funds to carry on their important community services. These are designed to meet the specific needs of our young people, to prevent or deal with family breakdowns and to provide care and protection for children, as well as to benefit the blind, the handicapped and the aged.

The maintenance of these Red Feather services depends on the continued support of each one of us, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to join in the invitation to my fellow Canadians to give generous support to their local Community Chest or Welfare Federation.

(Signed) LOUIS S. ST. LAURENT,
Prime Minister

Ottawa, 1951

SUPPORT YOUR RED FEATHER CAMPAIGN

CANADIAN *Welfare*

a magazine on social welfare published
seven times a year by

THE CANADIAN WELFARE COUNCIL
245 COOPER ST., OTTAWA, CANADA

PUBLICATION DATES

February 1, March 15, May 1, June 15,
September 15, November 1,
December 15

Authorized as second class mail, Post Office
Department, Ottawa.

Subscription price, \$2.00 per annum
Single copies 30 cents

Signed articles which appear in *WELFARE*
should be regarded as expressing the
opinion of the writer, and not necessarily
the point of view of the Board of Governors
of the Canadian Welfare Council.

R. E. G. DAVIS, Executive Director

Canadian Welfare Council Individual Membership Fees

Associate \$3.00; Participating \$5.00;
Sustaining \$10.00 and up

All the above membership fees include a
year's subscription to *WELFARE*.

Editorial Board

★

Robert McKeown, Ottawa, *Chairman*

A. Andras, Ottawa

Florence Bird, Ottawa

Raymond-J. Bériault

Eugene Forsey, Ottawa

Dorothy Hodgson, Ottawa

Svanhuit Josie, Ottawa

Jean MacCrimmon, Montreal

Joy A. Maines, Ottawa

Martha Moscrop, Vancouver

Monica McQueen, Winnipeg

★

R. E. G. Davis, *Editor*

Marjorie King, *Managing Editor*

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Editorials	1
New Tasks for Chests and Councils, <i>by Carl Reinke</i>	3
Mae Fleming Retires, <i>by Bessie Touzel</i>	8
Some Aspects of Welfare Planning and Defence, <i>by Charles E. Hendry</i>	10
Staff Changes	19
September and October are Survey Months	20
Local Housing Research and Urban Redevelopment, <i>by Albert Rose</i>	21
1951 Spring Campaign Results	29
The Community Chest—Stronger Year by Year	30
Coming Events of Interest to Council Members	31
Labour Leaders Ask Support for Chests	32
What the Council is Doing	33
Across Canada	36
About People	42
Book Review	45
A Competition	<i>Inside back cover</i>
1952 Community Chest Campaigns	<i>Outside back cover</i>